
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. For that purpose we sit in an upright and comfortable position.

If we are to live a meaningful life we need to have a controlled and subdued mind, as opposed to a wild, untamed mind, And it is meditation that helps us to subdue our minds.

We will definitely derive benefits from a genuine attempt to adopt a meditation practice in our life. In learning how to withdraw our mind from external distractions, and turn its focus within, we end up being in control of our minds for a significant amount of time. That makes our minds serviceable, which means that, even though delusions or negative states of mind may still arise, we will not be completely under their control. In other words we will be protecting ourselves from unfettered delusions.

We really need to contemplate the practical benefits and advantages of applying the practice of meditation, along with the disadvantages of not meditating. That, in itself, becomes a great incentive to really take personal responsibility for one's own well-being. Seeing the advantages of meditation practice, one takes personal responsibility for trying to apply meditation practice in one's daily life.

This in turn becomes the basis for a sound understanding of the real significance and purpose of the practice. Thinking in such a way, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of the practice of meditation, will actually help us to be able to assess whatever else we are doing in life. The practice of always looking into the pros and cons, equating the advantages and disadvantages, and making clear distinctions between the alternatives, will assist us in our everyday life.

What we particularly need to understand is that as we become more and more familiar with the technique and try to apply it in our daily life, it will help our minds to become more and more focussed, and with a focussed mind we will begin to have a clear mind.

So what does our mind need to be clear of? What is preventing it from being clear now? To understand that, we need to understand how in ordinary everyday life, it is as if the clarity of our mind is obscured by pollution. The pollutants are the delusions such as anger, attachment, pride, jealousy and so forth, which cloud the natural purity and clear state of the mind.

When we bring our focus within, and place it on an object of meditation, then during that time our mind will not be influenced by the delusions, and so it will naturally become clear. This helps us to distinguish our primary mind, which by its very nature is unpolluted and free from delusions, from the mind dominated by delusions. Once we make this distinction it gives us the real hope that we can separate the

delusions i.e. the mental pollutants, from our primary mind. Meditation practice helps us to realise that it is possible to do that. And that is, as I stress again and again, the essential point of understanding the value of meditation.

We are in the situation where we are obsessed with trying to clean something which by nature is unclean, and neglecting to clean something, which although temporarily polluted, can be cleaned. More specifically the mind is, as mentioned previously, by nature clear, but at present it is temporarily polluted by the delusions. However, because its very nature is a clear state, it can be cleaned, which we seem to neglect to do. Yet we try to clean our bodies which by their very nature are unclean. You may be taken aback by this statement. However when we think about it, the very nature of our body is that it is unclean.

When we attempt to clean our bodies, we are merely scrubbing the outer surface. We may temporarily clean the skin, but there are all sorts of unclean substances that the body produces, which ooze out of it. We don't have to name them as we all know what they are. By its very nature our body has to have an internal system of organs, a digestive system, mucous membranes, and so on. Without those internal organs, we would not be able to survive as they are an inseparable part of the body.

Yet we spend so much time trying to achieve the unachievable, cleaning a body that is, by its very nature, unclean. To take that idea further, when we are young we tend to think that our body is beautiful, and that it can be cleaned and made even more beautiful. But after the age of thirty then there's not much we can do to beautify our bodies. As we age the real nature of the body begins to show on the outside as well.

The great Indian master, Shantideva mentioned that we spend so much time in trying to beautify and sustain this body that we are like slaves to our own body. We work so hard to feed it, to cloth it, to clean it, and to beautify it. We spend most of our time trying to maintain this body and make it perfect, and so we are like slaves. The point here is that, while we spend so much time and energy in trying to clean something which by its very nature is unclean, we neglect cleaning the mind, which can be cleaned and can be purified. As mentioned previously, the delusions can be completely eradicated, yet we don't always see that. We need to really understand this point.

The point that Shantideva was making was that as we spend so much time and energy in sustaining our body, to the point of being like slaves to it, we need to make good use of that body. Shantideva's point is that we can use our body to work towards cleaning our mind, thus putting our body to better use, which will be much more significant and beneficial.

To re-emphasise the point, when we think about it, we spend so much time and energy in clothing and feeding and sustaining our bodies. This is not to deny the fact that when we take care and look after of our body, we do experience the benefit of good health. So our care of our body has not gone to waste. The temporary benefit is that we enhance our health and we feel fresh and good. Imagine the benefits then if we were to spend similar amount of time and energy in cleaning our mind! The positive effects of cleaning the mind will last much longer and will be much more effective for our overall well-being. These are the significant points that we need to consider and that's the point I am trying to make.

In summary, when we take care of our bodies, we derive the benefits of having a good healthy body. Likewise, if we take care of, and protect our mind, we will experience the benefits of that as well. So now the question is: How do we take care of our mind? What is the ultimate way to protect our mind? And the answer to that is the practice of meditation. Meditation practice is the supreme method for cleansing our mind.

We are already quite skilled in knowing how to take care of our body. But we need to know the unmistakable methods of how to cleanse and purify our mind, and train in that.

Once, when I was trying to emphasise a point about having to take care of our bodies because we can't buy another body, someone said, 'Well, actually there is a shop called 'Body Shop'! But I don't think you can buy a new body from there. Sometimes when we don't really understand the real meaning behind terms, we can get a bit confused. I recall that when some Tibetans arrived here, one said, 'I saw a sign for a Garage Sale. It's very strange; they keep the house but sell the garage!!'

While that may be a little bit off the topic, it brought in a bit of humour and I feel that humour has a significant place in our lives. Sometimes when we feel a little bit down or depressed, light talk with some humour will definitely lift our spirits a bit. So it has some benefits. Within the family, it is good to try to bring in some light humour once in a while, as it can lift up the mind a bit and make everything a bit brighter. It can also help to remove some sort of ill wind or disease in the mind.

Coming now to the actual meditation practice, we can readjust ourselves into an upright, relaxed posture and then remind ourselves that the object we are focussing on for our meditation will be our breath. To highlight the main point, in order to focus single-pointedly on the breath, the two main conducive factors are mindfulness and introspection. We need to apply mindfulness on the breath and have introspection which is a vigilant mind, making sure that we are focused on it. The two opposing factors that we need to try to overcome are excitement and laxity. I have explained all of this in previous sessions. Bring these to mind to remember what we need to overcome. The manner of focussing on the breath is by applying our full attention and focus on the breath itself, which means withdrawing from all other forms of discursive thoughts and memories and so forth, and bringing our full attention within ourselves.

Having brought our full attention and focus on the breath itself, we place a 100% focus on the breath and maintain that focus for the next couple of minutes. (*pause for meditation*).

That will be sufficient for now.

4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope

4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2. The actual development of the mind that strives for others' welfare

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2.1. Cultivating loving kindness

We have come to the second subdivision of Training the Mind to Strive for the Welfare of Others, which is The Actual Development of the Mind that Strives for Others' Welfare. This in turn is subdivided into three: 1) Cultivating Loving Kindness, 2) Cultivating of Compassion, and 3) Cultivating the Superior Intention.

While love will be more specifically described later, the general definition of love is focusing on beings who are deprived of happiness, and whole-heartedly wishing them to have happiness.

In this instance, where we are developing love and compassion as a means to achieve the altruistic mind of enlightenment, the particular type of love is the strong sense of love that sees the other as very appealing. The analogy used in the teaching is the unconditional love of a mother for her only child—to her the child is incredibly appealing, and her concern is only for the well-being of the child. We need to develop a heart-warming love for all other beings in the same way, seeing them all as being equally appealing and endearing.

In the seven-point cause and effect sequence of generating bodhicitta that is being presented here, love precedes compassion, i.e. love here is considered as a cause for developing compassion. This differs from other instances where there's no specific sequence for developing love and compassion, and either one can be developed first.

Cultivating Love is presented under seven sub-headings.

1. The Object. In order to cultivate love we need to understand the object of that love, which is living beings who do not have happiness. So what does that mean? It means that we find it unbearable to see beings who are deprived of happiness, and so we naturally generate the inclination of wanting them to be happy. That whole mindset of love is based on the interests of others, rather than self-interest. Our love arises as a result of seeing others deprived of happiness. That focus on others' well-being is a point we need to keep in mind.

What is described here is an unconditional love based on the needs of others. This love differs from the so-called 'love' that arises primarily out of attachment. Although it is called 'love' in conventional terms, it is doubtful as to whether it is actually a true form of love. The conventional love that we talk about in relationships is very much based on self-interest. The primary reason for conventional love is that the appealing and attractive qualities of another fulfils our own desires. Now I am not the one to judge whether that conventional love is true love or not. But people have confided in me that having been through ups and downs and difficulties in their relationships, they have discovered for themselves that the feelings they had for their partners weren't true love at all. In fact it was actually attachment. As far as love is concerned, however, they do recognise that they have experienced an unconditional love for their children.

That is not to say that even though conventional love is mixed with attachment there's no real value in that. It fact it does bring some benefit. Because you are attracted to the other, and for as long as they are nice and attractive to you, you might be nice to them. So to that degree you are actually benefitting them. So the delusion of attachment can bring some benefit for the other. The delusion of anger, however, definitely brings no benefit at all. Anger is, by its very nature, an intention to harm, and cannot bring any benefit,

whereas attachment can, to some degree, bring benefits for the other.

However, the love that is based on strong attachment is neither firm nor stable. There is only love for the other for as long as they are attractive and agreeable to us, and maintain the attributes we want to see in them. But the moment that changes, then our so-called 'love' goes out the window, and we start feeling hostile towards them. In contrast, when our love is based solely on wishing them to be happy then that is a very firm and stable love, because it is not based on how they make one feel, or whether or not they are fulfilling our own needs. We can say that such a love is an unconditional love, unstained by selfish attitudes of attachment or self-cherishing.

When this unconditional love is combined with superior intention, then it is transformed into a sense of taking personal responsibility for creating the causes for others to experience happiness.

2. The next attribute of this unconditional love is its **subjective aspect**. This is explained as thinking, 'How nice it would be if all beings were happy. May they be happy. I will cause them to be happy'. These are the aspects and attributes of the love we develop for others.

Having been exposed to these descriptions of love, it is worthwhile to take this as a personal instruction. The type of love described here is an unconditional type of love, a love that goes from thinking how nice it would be if all beings were happy, to thinking, 'I will cause them to be happy'. We need to try to adopt that sort of attitude with those whom we associate with in our everyday life, beginning with our partners, our friends, or whoever surrounds us. Try to develop an attitude of, 'How wonderful it would be if they are happy. May they be happy. I will create the causes for their happiness'. If one can maintain that attitude, it will be extremely valuable in sustaining relationships with others, because it is based on a genuine sense of concern for the other. When one develops that genuine sense of concern, the other will naturally appreciate that.

As I regularly stress again and again, the friend or partner who has a genuine concern for us is the most precious individual in our life. How do you determine who has a genuine concern for us? It will be the person who helps us and supports us at the most difficult times in our life. Such a person, whoever they may be, is extremely precious because they have a genuine concern for our well-being.

Having such a concern is a mutual thing that we need to practice. We need to begin from our own side, by expressing our unconditional love for the other, and when the other begins to appreciate that, then we will in turn receive that same genuine concern.

That genuine concern for the people in our life can then slowly be extended. A practical benefit of developing genuine concern for others is, when there is a genuine sense of love for others, there's no room for loneliness. That suffering of loneliness, which is quite prevalent in the west, seems to come about when one loses a true sense of love for others. That leads to feeling like there is no one who cares and that people are avoiding us. With an honest and thorough investigation, we will come to realise that actually it is not so much that others are avoiding us, but that it is more that we ourselves are lacking that true sense of unconditional love and genuine concern from our own side.

However when we develop a genuine sense of concern and unconditional love in our heart, we will realise that this is our true inner friend. As long as we maintain the most valuable and precious inner friend of unconditional love, we will never lose external friends. But the moment we lose this internal friend, we will begin to start losing our external friends as well.

Based on these factors, I regularly emphasise that we need to really assess our relationships with others and value those good, reliable friends that we have in our lives. I stress these points because that is most useful thing for a happy and meaningful life. The person who has the genuine interest in our well-being, who wants to benefit us as much as possible, who wants to protect us from any kind of harm is the most precious and valuable person in one's life.

We are really fooling ourselves if we neglect such a person and go off searching for someone else with qualities we might place more value on, especially if they don't have that quality of unconditional love. The point is that when we recognise an individual being or person as having that genuine concern for us, wanting to benefit us in every possible way, and wanting no harm to befall us, we need to really value and cherish that person and return our own unconditional love from our own side. That is what we really need to be mindful of in our relationships with others.

Of course I am merely just sharing the values that I consider to be important in a friend. I am not sure what attributes you value in a friendship? But as for me, I consider someone a good friend when they have that attitude of wishing to benefit us as much as possible and wanting us to be free from any kind of harm. When one places these values on a friendship, then there will be a real sense of contentment and satisfaction in that relationship. Satisfaction comes when one actually begins to recognise and appreciate that value of wanting to benefit others.

That is also how trust develops, because what else is trust based on? Trust arises when we recognise that the only interest that someone has is to benefit us, and that they don't have any inclination to harm us or want any harm to befall us. When we recognise that someone has those values, we naturally trust them, don't we? These are the values we look for in others aren't they? When they are mutually expressed, naturally there will be mutual trust.

In short, unconditional love is essential.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation, this time the object of meditation, will be the sound of the mantra, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Whilst we hear the recitation of the mantra, we try to keep our entire focus and attention on the sound of the mantra. When the mantra recitation subsides, we try to maintain our focus on the residue of the sound, within the vacuity an empty space and just keep one's mind and focus on that for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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